

Amateurs in Action

Recounts of ham radio operators who have used their time and skills to help others in a time of need



Katrina lifeline

On 29 August 2005, after having already ravaged southern Florida, [Hurricane Katrina](#) struck the Louisiana coast with Category 5 fury. It wasn't so much the unprecedented winds that tore up the City of New Orleans, but the storm surge, which submerged 80% of the metropolis due to the [levee failures](#), since much of the city is below sea level. Louisiana had a statewide system at the time, that allowed every parish (equivalent to our county) to communicate with officials in Baton Rouge, the capital. The hurricane caused that link to fail, cutting off many of the parishes in the southeast part of the state.

Adam Tamplain KD5LEH of [LaPlace, Louisiana](#), had evacuated his family ahead of the hurricane, but returned to St. John Parish when he heard that it had been spared the brunt of the storm. He called in to the St. John EOC (Emergency Operations Center), and things were operating smoothly. The following morning, however, the first levee broke, and suddenly much of New Orleans was underwater. *I went to the EOC and immediately got to work*, said Adam. *All of the affected parishes could talk to each other on this 800 MHz system, but nobody could get to Baton Rouge. I was relaying information from the affected parishes to Baton Rouge over ham radio.*



Adam Tamplain KD5LEH

When Adam was 15 years old, while following a local storm on TV in a hotel lobby, he heard the receptionist say that many of the big-time storm followers were radio operators. After the storm, Adam contacted a local ham radio club and by July 2000, he got his license. He immediately got hold of the St. John EOC and has been one of their volunteers ever since.

Adam remained overnight in the EOC, fielding numerous calls from people stuck on rooftops and others needing rescue. As soon as people got a bar of cell service, they called 911, only to get routed to the St. John Parish EOC. When the dispatchers realized the victims were in isolated areas, they handed the caller's info to Adam, who relayed the info to capital. The capital

EOC would then relay the info to the National Guard or Search-and-Rescue, to dispatch a chopper to the victims. *The calls came in for two or three days straight*, Adam said.

You have all of these sophisticated multi-million dollar systems out there, but when it comes down to it, there is still a vital need for an individual with his or her own transmitting equipment, independent of network systems and independent of the Internet, Adam said.

You can read more about Adam's efforts in the [L'Observateur](#) and the [Louisiana ARRL Section website](#).

